

# *Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: The Use of Diegesis\**

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Epiphanius, bishop of Pavia from 467–497, had a special way of reading the Holy Scriptures:

What he had read through once, he repeated from memory. So that his reading of Holy Scripture might not be a mere rapid running through the words, he portrayed in his acts the passage that he had read. If he read a book of the Prophets, one saw him, having set aside the book, transformed from reader into prophet. If he had read the books of the ancient law, he proceeded, a worthy emulator of Moses, just as if bands of Israelites were following him through the desert. Or if his Scriptural guide, tempering the severity of the Law, had revealed the sweetness of the Apostle's words and the love and tenderness of Christ's passion, speech sweeter than the honeycomb immediately flowed from his lips. In fine, his life made manifest the lessons he had learned from the Sacred Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

This powerful description by Epiphanius' biographer Ennodius shows the impact the Holy Scriptures could have in bringing about an immediate transformation of the reader. While the phenomenon of *lectio divina* has been the subject of several important studies, hardly any work has been done regarding hagiographical stories and their effect on the

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1. Ennodius, *Epiph.* 30–31 (MGH, Auct. Ant. 7 [88, 3–11]; transl. FOTC 15, 309–10).

audience. The present essay is intended to open up this new field of investigation by proposing some preliminary observations on the implicit spiritual value of hagiographical writing *as writing*. Hagiographical texts play a significant and very particular role in the process that joins the author and his audience in their participation in the sanctity of the holy man or woman. It is this process, which I would like to call “spiritual communication,” that is explored in this article, based on the evidence of the Greek hagiographical production of the fourth to seventh centuries.

The multifaceted connections that tie together the saint, the hagiographer and his work, and the audience are implicit in the *topoi* commonly encountered in the prefaces to hagiographical works. When hagiographers reflect on their role, they usually explain that they were prompted to take up their pen because of their desire to preserve the precious memory of the saint for posterity. Quite often, the hagiographer is a disciple of the saint and thus can claim for himself the status and authority of an eyewitness of the events he describes. As a disciple—or even if he had no direct contact with the living saint, but profited from the saint’s miraculous powers indirectly—he may also be motivated to undertake his work because he feels an obligation of gratitude to the saint. In this way, the hagiographer presents himself as the prototype of the saint’s clientele, and hence as a model for the ideal audience of his own text. Further, as a recipient of benefits from the saint, the author also assumes for himself the role of witness of the saint’s miraculous abilities. Connected with this is another *topos*, the invocation of the saint in the preface to a *vita*. A hagiographer who protests his inability to do justice to the saint’s accomplishments in his writing and prays to the saint to inspire him and to guide his pen, effectively presents his own text as a miracle brought forth through the intercession of the saint. He casts himself in the dual role of beneficiary and proclaimer of this miracle, and involves his audience as witness, thus proving the efficacy of the saint while lending authority and authenticity to his own writing.

A further method to validate a text and to enhance its communicative function is the use of a particular kind of storytelling. This article was prompted by the observation that many Greek hagiographers of the fourth to seventh centuries refer to their writing as a *diegesis*, and to their activity as *diegeisthai*. Assertions of this kind are so frequent that the word *diegesis* in this context appears to have a special meaning which merits further investigation. These connotations are discussed in the first part of this article, which is based on the relevant passages in hagiographical writing. The second part extends the investigation to the non-Christian authors of Late Antiquity. I hope to demonstrate that the

hagiographers, indebted as they were to the classical understanding of *diegesis*, infused this word with new meaning.

The verb *diegeisthai*, from which the nouns *diegesis* and *diegema* are derived, in the most general sense means “to tell, to report.”<sup>2</sup> *Diegesis* (Latin: *narratio*) is thus a brief account. But in the Christian literature of Late Antiquity, *diegesis* refers specifically to an anecdote or story that is of edifying character. The use of this word is especially prevalent in hagiographic works that present an agglomeration of such stories, relating to a number of holy men and women, such as the *Historia monachorum*, the *Historia Lausiaca* by Palladius of Helenopolis (ca. 420), and the *Historia religiosa* by Theodoret of Cyrrhus (440).

A few examples for the use of the word in these collections of hagiographical stories may suffice: In the prologue to the *Historia Lausiaca*, Palladius refers to his work as a “small book in the shape of a *diegema*.”<sup>3</sup> Later he announces that he will now begin the *diegeseis* (pl.),<sup>4</sup> and further along in the text, he makes a point of including in his *diegema* the account of a rich virgin.<sup>5</sup> Palladius on a later occasion explains that others had great admiration for Abba Or, whom he had never encountered himself, adding that his authorities had stated this “in the *diegemata*”—which here almost sounds like a title.<sup>6</sup> The author of the *Historia monachorum*, before embarking on his *diegesis*, expresses the hope that his work (now called *exegesis*) will instill in the audience the desire to emulate the holy men, or at least be morally uplifting.<sup>7</sup> The

2. The following discussion includes not only the verb *diegeisthai* and the noun *diegesis*, but also the noun *diegema*, which the hagiographers seem to treat as synonymous with the former: Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* (*Rhetores graeci* 6 [4, 9–15]). Aphthonios, *Progymnasmata* (*Rhetores graeci* 10 [2, 16–18]) and Nikolaos the Sophist, *Progymnasmata* (*Rhetores graeci* 3 [455, 9–18]), distinguish between the two, saying that a *diegesis* is about several things, as for example the whole epos of the *Iliad*, while a *diegema* is about one thing, an example being the description of the shield of Achilles. But others like Theon, *Progymnasmata* (*Rhetores graeci* 2 [78, 15ff]); this pagination is maintained in the new edition and French transl. by M. Patillon, G. Bolognesi [Paris, 1997]), use both terms interchangeably, *pace* G. L. Kustas, *Studies in Byzantine Rhetoric*, *Analekta Blatadon*, 17 (Thessalonike, 1973), 79 n. 3.

3. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* [HL] Prol. 2 (ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, Italian transl. M. Barchiesi [s.l., 1974] 6, 23; Engl. transl. ACW 34, 23): ἐν διηγήματος εἶδει τὸ βιβλίον τοῦτο; cf. also Prol. 2 (Bartelink 4, 17; transl. 23): τὰ τῶν πατρῶν διηγήματα.

4. HL, Prol. 16 (Bartelink 16, 164; transl. 29): Ἀρξάμενος τοίνυν τῶν διηγήσεων.

5. HL 6.1 (Bartelink 30, 1; transl. 37): Οὐ παραλείψω δὲ ἐν τῷ διηγήματι.

6. HL 9.1 (Bartelink 44, 5; transl. 44): Καὶ τοῦτο ἔλεγον ἐν τοῖς διηγήμασιν.

7. *Historia monachorum* [HM], Prol. 12 (ed. and French transl. A.-J. Festugière, Subs. hag. 53 [Brussels, 1971], 8, 73–9, 1; Engl. transl. N. Russell, *The Lives of the*

elaborate prologue to Theodoret of Cyrrhus' *Historia religiosa*, in which the author reflects on his task at great length, begins by emphasizing the benefit of hearing about the protagonists of a saintly lifestyle in the form of *diegemata* related by first-hand observers.<sup>8</sup> He then explains that he will illustrate the particular way of life (*bios*) of the holy men and women of Syria through select examples: "Since, therefore, they have received different gifts, we shall rightly compose the narrative [*diegema*] of each one individually. We shall not work through the whole course of their actions. . . . Instead, we shall narrate [*diegesamenoi*] a selection from the life and actions of each and display through this selection the character of the whole life, and then proceed to another."<sup>9</sup> Towards the end of his prologue, Theodoret declares his stylistic preferences: "The account will proceed in narrative form [*aphegematikos*], not following the rules of panegyric but forming a plain tale [*diegesin*] of some few facts."<sup>10</sup> Then he concludes: "So starting from there, I shall begin my narrative [*diegeseos*]."<sup>11</sup>

These authors uniformly designate as *diegesis* or *diegema* the narration, either by an eyewitness or based on eyewitness reports, of one or several edifying stories in a style that is distinct from other kinds of literary representations, such as panegyric. The origin of the tradition of

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*Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* [Kalamazoo and Oxford, 1981], 50–51): "Ὅθεν πολλὴν ὠφελίαν ἐξ αὐτῶν πορισάμενος ἐπὶ τὴν ἐξήγησιν ταύτην ἐχρησάμην, πρὸς ζῆλον μὲν καὶ ὑπόμνησιν τῶν τελείων, πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν δὲ καὶ ὠφελίαν τῶν ἀρχομένων ἀσκεῖν. Πρὸς τὴν οὖν θεοῦ θρόνοντος ἀρχὴν ποιήσω τὰς διηγήσεις τὴν τῶν ἁγίων καὶ μεγάλων πατρῶν πολιτείαν διηγούμενος . . . . In Prol. 2 (Festugière 6, 18; transl. 49), he speaks of τὴν διήγησιν ταύτην.

8. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa* [HR], Prol. 1 (ed. and French transl. P. Canivet, A. Leroy-Molinghen, SCh 234 [Paris, 1977], 124, 5–7; Engl. transl. R. M. Price, *A History of the Monks in Syria* [Kalamazoo, 1985], 3): Φορεῖ δὲ ὁμῶς ὄνησιν οὐ μετρίαν τῶν τοιούτων κατορθωμάτων καὶ τὰ διηγήματα, παπὰ τῶν εἰδόντων ταῖς τῶν οὐκ εἰδόντων ἀκοαῖς προσφερόμενα. Cf. Prol. 2 (Canivet 126, 16; transl. 3).

9. HR, Prol. 8 (Canivet 138, 11–17; transl. 7): Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν διαφόρων τετυχήκασιν δωρεῶν, εἰκότως ἰδίᾳ ἐκάστου ποιησόμεθα τὸ διήγημα, οὐχ ἅπαντα διεξιόντες τὰ πεπολιτευμένα . . . , ἀλλ' ὀλίγα τῶν ἐκάστῳ βεβιωμένων μετρημένων διηγήσασθαι, καὶ διὰ τῶν ὀλίγων τοῦ παντὸς βίου τὸν χαρακτὲρα παραδείξαντες, ἐφ' ἕτερον βαδισόμεθα.

10. HR, Prol. 9 (Canivet 140, 7–9; transl. 7): Ἀφηγηματικῶς δὲ ὁ λόγος προβήσεται, οὐ νόμοις ἐγκωμίων χρησάμενος, ἀλλ' ὀλίγων τινῶν ἀτεχνῶς ποιούμενος τὴν διήγησιν.

11. HR, Prol. 11 (Canivet 144, 22–23; transl. 9): Ἀρξομαι δὲ τὰς διηγήσεις ἐνθεν ἐλθὼν. Throughout the work, he continues to refer to it as a *diegesis* or *diegema*, and to his activity as *diegeisthai*: e.g., HR 1.1 (Canivet 162, 19; transl. 12); 1.3 (Canivet 166, 12; transl. 13); 1.14 (Canivet 192, 12; transl. p. 20); 2.12 (Canivet 220, 3; transl. 29); 2.15 (Canivet 226, 7; transl. 30).

telling such *diegeseis* reaches back to the beginnings of the monastic movement in the Egyptian desert in the second half of the third century, when *diegeseis* were passed on through oral communication.<sup>12</sup> The early desert fathers were prepared to share their experience and wisdom with visitors who wished to learn from them, and thus become their disciples. These visitors would establish themselves in the vicinity of an experienced desert father for a certain period of time, sometimes for a few days and months, sometimes for years and maybe even for the rest of their lives. Upon the request “Father, give me a word,” the desert hermits would communicate from the treasures of their wisdom a response that cut right through to the heart of the listener. It often addressed an unexpressed inner need, thus displaying the father’s supernatural power of discernment. These “words” would then become guidelines for the life of the recipient, prompting him to pursue a specific course of action. Sometimes, the holy man himself, through his own way of life, represented such a “word,” in that merely by beholding him, by seeing the evidence of a God-pleasing life in his body marked by the austerity of asceticism, the visitor “got the message,” as it were, and was prompted to mend his ways. It was an intensely personal and strikingly direct way of communicating, a communication that could only take place in a personal encounter and in oral conversation, and which bore fruit in an inner transformation of the listener. The “words” of the desert fathers and mothers were soon assembled into collections and disseminated in written form, either arranged alphabetically by name or organized according to the virtues they illustrate. In addition to the alphabetical and systematical collections of the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, the spread and expansion of monasticism also resulted in the production of more localized collections that focused on the founding fathers of a particular monastery, in the form of a *Paterikon*.

These “words” were often couched in brief and simple stories that set the scene for the holy person’s utterance. In its enlarged form, the pithy remark becomes an edifying story of saintly conduct. This connection between *apophthegma* and *diegesis*, between word and deed, is implied in the preface to the alphabetical collection of the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*: “Most people have at different moments set out the words and the righteous deeds of the holy old men in the form of a *diegema*, in some

12. For this context, see D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York and Oxford, 1993), esp. 76–103, and Ph. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford, 1978), 19–32.

kind of simple and unembellished speech.”<sup>13</sup> Such *diegemata* became the favored reading material of those aspiring to the holy life in later generations. In a story contained in a collection of his sayings, Abba Zosimas, who probably lived in the late fourth century, reports how he and a venerable old man in a monastery in Tyre read together in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*: “For the blessed man loved to read them always, and he almost breathed them. And from them he brought forth the fruit of every virtue.”<sup>14</sup> When they came upon a story that describes the humility, simplicity, and generosity shown by a desert hermit to bandits who were robbing his cell, the old man explained to Abba Zosimas that when he read this story as a hermit in the desert of the Jordan, he was so struck by it that he prayed to God for the same virtues. And indeed, two days later the old man was granted his wish and his own cell was ransacked by bandits.<sup>15</sup> The experience of this old man, as recounted by Abba Zosimas, speaks to the transformative effect of *diegemata* on their audience that will concern us again below. Further evidence for the circulation of *diegemata* in written form and for their popularity as monastic reading material can easily be found: Palladius, for example, repeats in his *Historia Lausiaca* a *diegema* that he came across in an old book.<sup>16</sup> And in the sixth century, Saint Theodosius is said to read in the *diegemata* of holy fathers together with his host Marcianus, the head of a monastic community near Bethlehem, before they partake of a communal meal.<sup>17</sup>

By extension, the designation of *diegesis* could be applied to accounts of the saintly conduct of an individual that spanned the whole duration of his or her life. A surprising number of texts which we would tend to label as “saints’ lives” or “biographies” because of their arrangement of material relating to one particular saint in chronological sequence, do in fact avoid the word “life” (*bios*) in favor of *diegesis*. The *Life of Anthony*, justly celebrated as the earliest and most influential example of hagiographical writing, is a case in point. The work is in fact presented

13. *Apophthegmata Patrum*, PG 65.73A: Πλείστοι οὖν κατὰ διαφόρους καιροὺς τὰ ταῦτα τὰ τῶν ἁγίων γερόντων ῥήματά τε καὶ κατορθώματα ἐν διηγήματος εἶδει ἐξῆθεντο (my translation). Cf. the Engl. translation by B. Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (London, 1975).

14. *Zosimae abbatis alloquia* 10, PG 78.1693C: ἡγάπα δὲ ὁ μακάριος πάντοτε δι’ ὀρχεσθαι αὐτὰ, καὶ σχεδὸν ἔπνεεν· ὅθεν καὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν ἔκαρπασατο πᾶσαν ἀρετήν.

15. *Ibid.*, 1693C–1695A.

16. *HL* 65.1 (Bartelink 272, 2–274, 3; transl. 146): εἰς τὸν διήγημα τοιοῦτον.

17. Theodore, *Life of Theodosius* (ed. H. Usener, *Der heilige Theodosios: Schriften des Theodoros und Kyrillos* [1890; repr. Hildesheim, 1975], 73, 26–74, 1).

in epistolary form, entitled: “Letter of Athanasius, archbishop of Alexandria, to the monks abroad about the life of the blessed Anthony the Great.”<sup>18</sup> When Athanasius talks about Anthony’s *bios*, he means the holy man’s saintly lifestyle—not its literary description that he is composing.<sup>19</sup> This latter he refers to by the word *diegesis*.<sup>20</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus would later call Athanasius’ work “a rule for the monastic life in the shape of a *diegesis*.”<sup>21</sup> Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Macrina* is also presented in the form of a letter, and called a *diegesis* by its author.<sup>22</sup> The redactor of the *Life of Hypatius*, the early fifth-century abbot of the monastery of Rufianae in Constantinople, bases himself on a description of the life of the saint by his disciple Callinicus, “in a *diegesis*.”<sup>23</sup> Gerontius, the author of the *Life of Melania the Younger*, refers to his work as a *diegema*, explaining that he is thrusting himself into an “endless sea” of the *diegema*, although, as he later remarks, he finds himself rather overwhelmed by its immense breadth.<sup>24</sup>

It seems justified to say, then, that *diegesis* denotes a way of storytelling that finds preferred application in hagiographical writing. This storytelling is characterized by two features in particular, to which I now turn: its simple and unadorned style and its intrinsic truth-value. The absence of stylistic embellishment enables the audience to focus on the content of the story without the distractions of a lofty style. The relevant passage in the *Historia religiosa*, where the style of a *diegesis* is

18. *Vita Antonii* (ed. and French transl. G. J. M. Bartelink, SCh 400 [Paris, 1994], 124; my translation; cf. the translation by R. C. Gregg, *The Life of Anthony and the Letter to Marcellus* [New York, 1980], 29, which follows the edition of the Greek text in PG 26.835–976 that is now superseded).

19. *Ibid.*, Prol. 3 (Bartelink 126, 17–18; transl. 29).

20. *Ibid.*, Prol. 4 (Bartelink 128, 25–26; transl. 30).

21. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or. XXI In laudem Athanasii*, PG 35.1088A: Ἀντωνίου τοῦ θείου βίον συν᾽γραφε, τοῦ μοναδικοῦ βίου νομοθεσίαν, ἐν πλάσματι διηγήσεως.

22. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina* 1 (ed. and French transl. P. Maraval, SCh 178 [Paris, 1971] 140, 14–15): Γυνὴ δὲ Σὺν τῷ διηγήματος ἀφορμῇ.

23. Callinicus, *Life of Hypatius* 2 (ed. and French transl. G. J. M. Bartelink, SCh 177 [Paris, 1971], 63): εὐρὺν καὶ τοῦ ὀσιωτάτου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ὑπατίου τὸν βίον ἀνάγραπτον καὶ ὑπὸ τινος τῶν αὐτοῦ μαθητῶν ὀνόματι Καλλινίκου ἐν διηγῇσει ἐκτεθῶντα.

24. Gerontius, *Life of Melania*, Prol. (ed. and French transl. D. Gorse, SCh 90 [Paris, 1962], 124; Engl. transl. E. A. Clark, *The Life of Melania the Younger* [New York and Toronto, 1984], 25): εἰς τὸ ἄπειρον πῶλαχος τοῦ διηγήματος ἑμαυτὸν καθεῖναι παρασκευάζομαι; Prol. (Gorse 126; transl. 26): Διὸ ἐπειδὴ ἀπορῶ πρὸς τὸ ἀπ᾽ραντον μέκος τοῦ διηγήματος. While *diegema* in these passages refers to the work Gerontius is writing, the word is used above (Gorse 124; transl. 25) to denote “the story [*diegesis*] of her senatorial family”: τήν τε τοῦ συγκλητικοῦ γένους αὐτῆς διήγησιν.



almost the opposite of that of a panegyric, has already been cited. Gregory of Nyssa concludes the preface of his *Life of Macrina* by announcing that he will tell about his sister Macrina “in an unadorned and simple *diegema*.”<sup>25</sup> Eustratius, the late sixth- or early seventh-century author of the *Life of Golindouch*, a Persian noblewoman-turned-martyr, explains that the present story is not a display of verbiage, but “a demonstration of truth, or a *diegesis*.”<sup>26</sup> The anonymous author of the early seventh-century Greek *Life of Symeon the Younger*, a disciple of the famous stylite whose name he adopted, also insists on the simplicity of his account which, he claims, therefore presents the unadorned truth.<sup>27</sup> Attention to detail can also enhance the effect of plausibility of a narrative. The author of the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, the ascetic and some-time bishop of Anastasioupolis in Galatia who died in 613, calls his work a pious *diegesis* adding that he will, to the best of his ability, tell it with exact detail.<sup>28</sup> Another example is Leontius of Neapolis’ *Life of John the Almsgiver*, the charitable Patriarch of Alexandria (d. 619), which is really a supplement to an earlier work by John (Moschus) and Sophronius.<sup>29</sup> Leontius’ main informant was Menas of Alexandria whose acquaintance he had made on a journey and who proved to be extremely well informed about the patriarch’s pious deeds. Menas tells his story “without falsehood.”<sup>30</sup> Its effect on Leontius is total enrapture as though he was hearing the Holy Scriptures.<sup>31</sup> In

25. *Life of Macrina*, Prol. 1 (Maraval 142, 31): ἐν ἀκατασκευῇ τε καὶ ἀπλῶ διηγήματι.

26. *Life of Golindouch* 1 (ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Ἀνάλεκτα ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς σταχυολογίας 4 [1897; repr. Brussels, 1963], 149, 8–9): οὐ στωμυλίας ἐνδειξιν, ἀλλ’ ἀληθείας ἀπόδειξιν, >γουν διήγησιν; cf. the mention below of this kind of *diegemata* which delect the pious (150, 7). On the text and its author, see P. Peeters, “Sainte Golindouch, martyre perse,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 62 (1944): 74–125, esp. 80.

27. *Life of Symeon the Younger*, Prol. (ed. P. van den Ven, *La vie ancienne de s. Syméon Stylite le Jeune [521–592]*), vol. 1, Subs. hag. 32 [Brussels, 1962] 2, 37).

28. *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* 2 (ed. and French transl. A.-J. Festugière, *Vie de Théodore de Sykéôn*, vol. 1, Subs. hag. 48 [Brussels, 1970] 2, 17–19): τὴν θεοφιλοσύτην διήγησιν . . . , ὃν λεπτομερῶς ἐπείγομαι τὸ κατὰ δύναμιν ἐξηγήσασθαι.

29. On the composition of this text, see C. Mango, “A Byzantine Hagiographer at Work: Leontios of Neapolis,” in *Byzanz und der Westen: Studien zur Kunst des europäischen Mittelalters*, ed. I. Hutter, SB Österr. Ak. Wiss., Philos.-hist. Kl. 432 (Vienna, 1984), and most recently, L. Rydén, “Überlegungen zum literarischen Wert oder Unwert hagiographischer Texte,” *Eranos* 91 (1993): 47–60.

30. *Life of John the Almsgiver* (ed. and French transl. A.-J. Festugière, L. Rydén [Paris, 1974] 347, 188; Engl. transl. E. Dawes, N. H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* [Oxford, 1948], 210: ἀνευδῶς.

31. Ibid. (Festugière 346, 170–71; transl. 209).



repeating Menas' story, Leontius first calls it a *diegesis* of John's life, and then specifies a little below that it is a "detailed" *diegesis*.<sup>32</sup> Attention to detail and a simple style are thus, in the hagiographers' own evaluations, distinctive of their *diegeseis* and lend additional support to their inherent veracity.

The author's insistence on reporting from first-hand experience, either his own or that of his informants, further enforces the intrinsic truth-value of a *diegesis*. The author's claim to either being an eyewitness or to be relying on such is, of course, a well-known literary topos; still, it is worth considering its connotations in the context of early monasticism and the literature it generated. Again, the hagiographers provide some indications. Gregory of Nyssa insists on the trustworthiness of his account of the life of his sister Macrina because it depends not on the hearing of other *diegemata*, but derives from his own experience.<sup>33</sup> The notion of the eyewitness as narrator of a *diegema* also occurs in the *Life of Melania the Younger*. Gerontius, its author, introduces himself as an authority on his subject. Having spent considerable time with the saintly woman, he is an eyewitness to much of his story.<sup>34</sup> The author of the *Life of Symeon the Younger* refers to his work as a *diegesis*,<sup>35</sup> his activity as *diegeisthai*,<sup>36</sup> and claims to be relying on earlier reports as well as on his own experience as an eyewitness.<sup>37</sup> George, the author of the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, introduces himself as the saint's disciple and reveals the sources for his account: To some extent he relies on reports by Theodore's contemporaries, but the largest part of his information he claims to have heard from the saint himself, who in a one-on-one conversation graciously spoke (*diegoumenou*) about his life in order to arouse in "us" the desire to do likewise.<sup>38</sup>

The roles of narrator of a *diegesis*, eyewitness, and disciple of the holy man thus intersect in a profound way that calls for further elucidation. Palladius of Helenopolis and Theodoret of Cyrrhus provide the key passages. In the preface to the *Historia Lausiaca*, Palladius points out

32. Ibid. (Festugière 343, 24, cf. also 6; transl. 207): τὴν παρούσαν τοῦ ὁσίου τούτου μερικὴν τοῦ βίου διήγησιν.

33. *Life of Macrina*, Prol. 1 (Maraval 140, 17–20).

34. *Life of Melania*, Prol. (Gorse 125; transl. 25): χρόνον με οὐκ ὀλίγον σὺν αὐτῇ διατρίψαντα; and below (Gorse 128; transl. 27): ὅσα τε αὐτὸς αὐτοπροσῆπως ἐπρακα.

35. *Life of Symeon the Stylite the Younger*, Prol. (van den Ven 2, 23).

36. Ibid., Prol. (van den Ven 1, 10).

37. Ibid., 14–16.

38. *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* 22 (Festugière 19, 1–11, esp. 5–7; transl. Dawes and Boynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 102): τὰ δὲ πλεῖστα αὐτῶν καὶ παρ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὁσίου καὶ ἁγίου ἀνδρὸς ἀκήκοα, διάγοντος αὐτοῦ καταμόνας καὶ χαριῶντως διηγουμένου.

that Lausus, the imperial chamberlain at the court of Theodosius II, had commissioned this work because of his desire for the *diegemata* of the desert fathers and mothers, “those whom I have seen and those about whom I have heard, as well as those with whom I retreated” into various desert regions.<sup>39</sup> Palladius here presents himself in three roles: as the listener to the *diegemata* by others, thus assuming a role analogous to that of his own audience; as a first-hand observer; and as someone who has actively shared the life of those he describes. That *diegesis* is the next best thing to autopsy is brought up again later in this work when Palladius is told by the desert father Evagrius Ponticus, who was his mentor for several years, that he would like to hear in detail, by a first-hand observer (*diegoumenou*), about the way of life of John Lycopolis, a holy man of great repute.<sup>40</sup> Thus encouraged, Palladius pays a visit to John and on his return gives a report (*diegesamenos*) to his brethren, presumably including Evagrius.<sup>41</sup> Palladius is the first author to suggest that there is an intrinsic connection between hearing a *diegesis*, seeing a holy person, and actively sharing his life. This tripartite hierarchy is crucial to a proper understanding of the dynamic of hagiographic *diegesis*. It is encountered again in the prologue of Theodoret of Cyrrhus’ *Historia religiosa*. He asks that his audience should not question the veracity of his account. For he has seen some of it with his own eyes, and for the remainder bases himself on the oral report of eyewitnesses, a method which, he adds, has its well-established precedent in the *diegesis* of the Gospel of Luke, which I will discuss below.<sup>42</sup> In the conclusion of his prologue, Theodoret reemphasizes this point: “Some things we will tell as eyewitnesses, others we will tell because we trust the reports [*diegesamenois*] of eyewitnesses, men *who have themselves imitated the life of those [saints]*.”<sup>43</sup> This amounts to a definition of the character of the ideal eyewitness: He is not merely a distant observer, but a participant who inscribes in his own life, as it were, the lifestyle and virtues he observed in the saint by imitating him. What is being

39. Palladius, *HL*, Prol. 2 (Bartelink 4, 16–18; transl. 23): ὧν τε ἐπρακα καὶ περὶ ὧν ἀκήκοα, οἷς τε συνανέστράφη.

40. *HL* 35.3 (Bartelink 168, 22–24; transl. 99): τὰ δὲ τῶς πολιτείας αὐτοῦ ἀκοῦσαι ἀκριβῶς δυνήθω ἄλλου διηγουμένου.

41. *HL* 35.11 (Bartelink 174, 96–97; transl. 102): αὐτὰ ταῦτα διηγησάμενος τοῖς μακαρίοις πατράσιν.

42. Theodoret, *HR*, Prol. 11 (Canivet 142, 10–13; transl. 8).

43. *HR*, Prol. 11 (Canivet 142, 18–144, 20; transl. 9): Τοιγάρτοι καὶ ἡμεῖς τὰ μὲν ἐροῦμεν ὡς αὐτόπται, τὰ δὲ τοῖς αὐτόπταις διηγησάμενοις πεπιστευκότες, ἀνδράσι τὸν ἐκείνων βίον ἐξηλωκόσιν.

communicated is not simply a story, but a way of life, and it ought to be perpetuated not in words, but in deeds.<sup>44</sup>

The process of “spiritual communication” in the monastic milieu, introduced above, is of central importance in this context. Insofar as the hagiographers are eyewitnesses and disciples, they have been touched in their own lives by the encounter with the saint. If they are recipients of eyewitness accounts (*diegeseis*) which they then reproduce, they have, nonetheless, profited indirectly from the presence of the saint through their informants, who had been marked by their encounter with the holy person. Further, in an inversion of the original pattern, the fact that he is telling a *diegesis* allows the hagiographer to assume for himself the role of the eyewitness whose life has been touched, and who makes this experience public. Inasmuch as he has been affected by the exemplary life of a saint, he presents himself to his audience as the model for how his narrative should be received. The author of the *Historia monachorum*, for one, is hoping to derive some spiritual benefit for himself through the commemoration of the eremitic lifestyle of the Egyptian monks.<sup>45</sup> The act of giving a *diegesis* in writing can thus become a sort of spiritual participation in the occurrences that are being described. Far from being a mere conveyor of a message, the hagiographical account in the form of a *diegesis* is thus the message itself. What is more, it is something like an event that with its own spiritual force links the saint, the eyewitness/hagiographer, and the audience, and transports them to a level of timeless existence where the drama of the saint is played out perpetually and in eternity.

As it was used and understood by the Greek hagiographers, storytelling in the form of *diegesis* is distinguished by the external characteristics of brevity of content, simplicity of style, and attention to detail. These characteristic features of *diegesis* are also encountered in the classical authors that either wrote or were known in Late Antiquity. In the rhetorical schools of the Later Roman Empire, *diegesis* was a familiar technical term.<sup>46</sup> In the classical period, it had been germane to epideictic oratory, and more specifically to the judicial speech, where it comes after

44. For Theodoret's writing as a typological imitation of the Evangelists, see D. Krueger, “Typological Figuration in Theodoret of Cyrrhus' Religious History and the Art of Postbiblical Narrative,” *J ECS* 5 (1997): 393–419, esp. 413–17.

45. *HM*, Prol. 2 (Festugière 6, 14–21, transl. 49).

46. The following is a very schematic outline. For more detailed discussions, see R. Volkmann, *Die Rhetorik der Griechen und Römer in systematischer Übersicht*, 2nd ed. (1885; repr. Hildesheim, 1963), 148–64; J. Martin, *Antike Rhetorik: Technik und Methode* (Munich, 1974), 75–89.

the prologue and before the proof. The speeches by the fifth-century b.c.e. orator Lysias provide good examples of this use.<sup>47</sup> According to ancient theorists, *diegesis* is the description of the criminal act under consideration. Its aim is to impress the judges, preferably by evoking an emotional response. In order to be effective, it has to display the three basic characteristics first postulated by Isocrates in the fourth century b.c.e. and repeated, sometimes with further additions, by later rhetoricians: clarity (*saphenaeia*), brevity (*syntomia*), and probability (*pithanotes*).<sup>48</sup>

Clarity is achieved by the comprehensive and accurate rendering of all aspects of an action, in describing who did what, where, when, how, and for what reasons.<sup>49</sup> Avoidance of distracting displays of high style is also recommended. According to some rhetorical theorists, it is important that the description strictly adhere to the chronological sequence of events, although others, like Theon, suggest alternative ways of structuring the narrative. Brevity is essential in sustaining the attention of the audience. All unnecessary digressions must be avoided. If the author requires greater narrative latitude, he should at least address his audience with an apology, or announce the further course of his speech. Probability is accomplished through the inclusion of a large number of details, through the congruity of place and time, and through the congruity of the deed with the character of its perpetrator. As long as the story is inherently plausible and serves the purpose of illustrating important aspects of the character and motivation of its protagonists, the actual truthfulness of the account is only of secondary concern.

*Diegesis* was defined by Hermogenes and Quintilian as the “exposition of a matter that has happened or *as if* it has happened.”<sup>50</sup> In the service of plausibility and of effectiveness in imprinting the audience with an impression of the essence and hence the “truth” of a story, *diegesis* is capable of rendering obsolete the distinction between truth and like-

47. Lysias, *Or. 1 On the murder of Eratosthenes* 22 (ed. Th. Thalheim [Leipzig, 1913], 5; transl. LCL, 15); *Or. 3 Against Simon* 3 (Thalheim 29, transl. LCL, 73); *Or. 17 On the property of Eratosthenes* 1 and 2 (Thalheim 139, transl. LCL, 391).

48. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 4.2.31 (ed. M. Winterbottom, vol. 1 [Oxford, 1970], 206, 23–24; transl. LCL, vol. 2, 67): “Eam plerique scriptores maximeque qui sunt ab Isocrate uolunt esse lucidam breuem veri similem.” See also Volkmann, *Rhetorik*, 154–58, and Martin, *Antike Rhetorik*, 82–86.

49. Volkmann, *Rhetorik*, 36–37.

50. Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* (*Rhetores graeci* 6 [4, 6–7]): Τὸ διήγημα βούλονται εἶναι ἔκθεσιν πράγματος γεγονότος μὴ ὡς γεγονότος. Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.2.31 (Winterbottom 206, 20–21; my translation, cf. transl. LCL, 67): “Narratio est rei factae aut ut factae utilis ad persuadendum expositio.”

truth, between veracity and verisimilitude. It is significant in this regard that Aelius Aristides, the great protagonist of the Second Sophistic, includes in his treatment of simple speeches in Book Two of his *Rhetoric*, under the heading "On Trustworthiness," a paragraph on *diegesis*. He explains that the appearance of truth can be accomplished by presenting a story as a *diegesis*, even if what is being said is fabricated (*plasta*) or trifling (*mikra*).<sup>51</sup> These guidelines of rhetorical theory find their reflection in the literature of the period. The fantastic tales by the second-century author Lucian of Samosata, for example, bear the title "True *Diegemata*." In his preface, he happily proclaims the entirely fictitious character of his work, anticipating that his readers will enjoy it precisely "because I tell all kinds of lies in a plausible and specious way."<sup>52</sup> In other words, Lucian regards the way of telling a story, even if it is mendacious in content, as instrumental in creating the effect of truthfulness.

Much important work has been done in recent years to fine tune our understanding of the concepts of "truth" and "fiction" in ancient historiography, biography, and especially in the Hellenistic novels.<sup>53</sup> As C. B. R. Pelling, in a study of Plutarch's *Lives*, succinctly puts it: "It is not . . . that the concept of truth was itself different. . . . It is simply that the boundary between truth and falsehood was less important than that between acceptable and unacceptable fabrication, between things which were 'true enough' and things which were not. Acceptable rewriting will not mislead the reader seriously, indeed he will grasp more of the important reality if he accepts what Plutarch writes than if he does not. Truth matters; but it can sometimes be bent a little."<sup>54</sup> This paramount criterion of plausibility may go some way in explaining why hagiographical accounts tend to disappoint the modern reader's expectations of historically verifiable truth. Just like the ancient and Byzantine novels,<sup>55</sup> these

51. Aelius Aristides, *Ars rhetorica* 2.8.3 (ed. W. Dindorf, vol. 2 [1829; repr. Hildesheim, 1964], 795): Καὶ τὸ ἐν διηγήσεων εἰσαγαγεῖν τὰ λεγόμενα, καὶ πλαστά ἢ καὶ μικρά, ἀληθοῦς δοκεῖ εἶναι· ὥς γὰρ γεγονότα αὐτὰ λῶγει.

52. Lucian of Samosata, *Verae historiae* 1.2 (ed. M. D. Macleod, vol. 1 [Oxford, 1972], 82, 13–14; transl. LCL, vol. 1, 249): ὅτι ψεύσματα ποικίλα πιθανῶς τε καὶ ἐναλήθως ἐξηγηνόχαμεν.

53. See especially G. W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian* (Berkeley, 1994).

54. C. B. R. Pelling, "Truth and Fiction in Plutarch's *Lives*," *Antonine Literature*, ed. D. A. Russell (Oxford, 1990), 42–43.

55. See most recently J. R. Morgan, "Make-believe and Make Believe: The Fictionality of the Greek Novels," *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*, eds. C. Gill, T. P. Wiseman (Austin, 1993).

works do not make a distinction between truth and verisimilitude or like-truth. Their *raison d'être* is not the accurate representation of historical events, but the direct involvement of the audience in the narrative.

The appearance of truthfulness that is implicit in the employment of *diegesis* renders this form of storytelling particularly suitable to historical accounts. To give but a few examples: Polybius characterizes his work as a “historical *diegesis*” the style of which typically avoids ambitious displays of rhetoric.<sup>56</sup> Plutarch says that “the most effective historian is he who, by a vivid representation of emotions and characters, makes his narration (*diegesin*) like a painting.”<sup>57</sup> Flavius Josephus repeatedly refers to the narrative in his *Jewish Antiquities* as *diegesis*.<sup>58</sup>

The subject of a *diegesis* is not limited to historical events. It may also be of a more personal nature and include the report of encounters with the divine, through dreams, visions, or miraculous occurrences.<sup>59</sup> It is in this application that *diegesis* is often used in the Holy Scriptures. In the Old Testament, after someone has an encounter with God, after someone witnesses a miracle, or whenever someone has a meaningful dream, he announces this experience by means of *diegesis*. A few examples may suffice:

The Lord said to Moses: “Go to Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his officials, in order that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell (*diegesesthe*) your children and grandchildren how I have made fools of the Egyptians and what signs I

56. Polybius, *Historiae* 38.4.1 (ed. L. Dindorf, rev. Th. Büttner-Wobst, vol. 4, repr. of 2nd ed. [Stuttgart, 1963], 470, 10–13; transl. LCL, vol. 6, 397): Ὑπὲρ ὧν οὐ δεήσει θαυμάζειν ἐὰν παρεκβαίνοντες τὸ τῶν ἱστορικῶν διηγήσεως Σθός ἐπιδεικτικῶς ὦραν καὶ φιλοτιμῶς φανῶμεθα ποιούμενοι περὶ αὐτῶν τὴν ἀπαγγελίαν. “It should not surprise anyone if abandoning here the style proper to historical narrative I express myself in a more declamatory and ambitious manner.”

57. Plutarch, *De gloria Atheniensium* 347A (eds. W. Nachstädt, W. Sieveking, J. B. Titchener, *Plutarchi Moralia*, vol. 2 [Leipzig, 1971], 125, 18–19; transl. LCL, vol. 4, 501): τῶν ἱστορικῶν κράτιστος ὁ τὴν διήγησιν ὥσπερ γραφὴν πάθει καὶ προσποιεῖται εἰδωλοποιήσας.

58. For example, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.67 (ed. B. Niese, vol. 1 [Berlin, 1955], 16, 12; transl. LCL, vol. 4, 31); 4.196 (Niese, vol. 1, 264, 11, transl. vol. 4, 569); 9.214 (Niese, vol. 3, 311, 19–20; transl. vol. 6, 113); 12.137 (Niese, vol. 3, 96, 1–2; transl. vol. 7, 69–71).

59. Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.116 (ed. B. Niese, vol. 6 [Berlin, 1955], 175, 22–23; transl. LCL, vol. 2, 367); Aelius Aristides, *The Sacred Tales* 4 (ed. W. Dindorf, vol. 1 [1829; repr. Hildesheim, 1964], 546); Lucian of Samosata, *Somnium sive Vita Luciani* 17 (ed. M. D. Macleod, vol. 2 [Oxford, 1974], 141, 14–18; transl. LCL, vol. 3, 231).



have done among them—so that you may know that I am the Lord.” (Ex 10.1–2)

Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell (*diegesomai*) what he has done for me. (Ps 66.16)

Let the prophet who has a dream tell (*diegesastho*) the dream, but let the one who has my word speak (*diegesastho*) my word faithfully. (Jer 23.28)

This use is continued in the New Testament, where the news of Jesus’ miracles is made public through the act of *diegeisthai*. The connection between seeing with one’s own eyes and bearing witness by means of telling (*diegesis*) recurs in several passages in the New Testament:

Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it (*diegesanto*). (Mk 5.16)

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell (*diegesontai*) no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. (Mk 9.9)

“Return to your home, and declare (*diegou*) how much God has done for you.” (Lk 8.39)

But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described (*diegesato*) for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him. (Acts 9.27)

He motioned with his hand for them to be silent, and described (*diegesato*) for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. (Acts 12.17)

Of particular relevance is the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, where the Evangelist explains his purpose: “Since many have tried to set up a *diegesis* of those things that have occurred in our days, just like they have been transmitted to us by those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning. . . .” (Lk 1.1–2). Here, the *diegesis* is the result of a long chain of transmission which begins with the eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus. This programmatic statement in Luke’s *prooimion* has been interpreted by Schürmann to reveal his intention to write not as a historian, but as a faithful preserver of the tradition of the Church.<sup>60</sup> He goes on to demonstrate that Luke regards his Gospel not merely as an account, written in so many words, but rather as “ein Gnadenmittel, das uns in

60. H. Schürmann, “Evangelien-schrift und kirchliche Unterweisung,” *Das Lukas-Evangelium: Die Redaktions- und Kompositionsgeschichtliche Forschung*, ed. G. Braumann (Darmstadt, 1974; first published in *Miscellanea Erfordiana*, [Leipzig, 1962] and again in the author’s *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den synoptischen Evangelien* [Düsseldorf, 1968]), 146–49.

besonders unmittelbarer Weise das apostolische Kerygma zubringt und damit das Heil des gnadenvollen Christusgeschehens selbst über uns kommen läßt.”<sup>61</sup> In the language of the Old and the New Testaments, then, *diegesis* often means the trustworthy account of divine occurrence by an eyewitness which may even make of its audience immediate participants in the event it describes. As has been shown above, trustworthiness and plausibility were also included in the definition of *diegesis* in rhetorical theory.

It remains to be shown that the characteristics of *diegesis* set up in the rhetorical handbooks, i.e., clarity, brevity, and plausibility, were not confined to the realm of theory, but found their application in the pagan authors of the postclassical period. Indeed, many authors, from Polybius to the Emperor Julian, can be found who further qualify the word *diegesis* with the adjectives “clear” (*saphes*),<sup>62</sup> “brief, cohesive, tight” (*syneches*),<sup>63</sup> or “easy to follow” (*euparakolouthetos*).<sup>64</sup> The most elo-

61. Ibid., 168.

62. Lucian, *Icaromenippus* 23 (ed. M. D. Macleod, vol. 1 [Oxford, 1972], 304, 3–4; transl. LCL, vol. 2, 307): ἅπαντα διηγούμεν σαφῶς ἄνωθεν ἀρχάμενος, “[I] told him the whole story clearly, starting at the very beginning.” Cf. also Polybius, *Historiae* 32.11.6 (Buettner-Wobst, vol. 4, 375, 9–13; transl. LCL, vol. 6, 253): ὑπὲρ οὐ τὰ μὲν ἀναδραμόντες, τὰ δὲ προλαβόντες τοῖς χρόνοις συγκεφαλαιώσμεθα τὴν ὅλην πρᾶξιν, ἵνα μὴ κατὰ μέρος αὐτῶς οὔσης οὐδ’ ὅλως ἐπιφανοῦς ἐν διηρημένοις χρόνοις ἀπαγγέλλοντες εὐτελοῦ καὶ ἀσαφῶς ποιῶμεν τὴν διήγησιν. “I will give a succinct account of the whole of this matter, partly recurring to the past and partly anticipating the future, so that, the separate details of it being by no means striking, I may not by relating them under different dates produce a narrative both obscure and insignificant.”

63. Polybius, *Historiae* 1.13.9 (Buettner-Wobst, vol. 1, 16, 30–31; transl. LCL, vol. 1, 33): τοῦτον γὰρ τὸν τρόπον συνεχοῦς γιγνομένης τῆς διηγήσεως, justifies the omission of further details for the sake of the tight cohesion of the narrative. Ibid., 5.98.11 (Buettner-Wobst, vol. 2, 223, 9–10; transl. LCL, vol. 3, 237): the author resumes the thread of the narrative (τὸ συνεχὲς τῆς διηγήσεως). Similarly 5.105.10 (Buettner-Wobst, vol. 2, 231, 27–29, transl. LCL, vol. 3, 253). Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 20.1.1 (ed. C. T. Fischer, vol. 5 [Leipzig, 1906], 174, 1–7; transl. LCL, vol. 10, 145): Τοῖς εἰς τὰς ἱστορίας ὑπερμήκεις δημηγορίας παρεμβάλλουσιν μὲν πυκναῖς χρωμένοις ῥητορείαις δικαίως ἂν τις ἐπιτιμήσειεν· οὐ μόνον γὰρ τὸ συνεχὲς τῆς διηγήσεως διὰ τὴν ἀκαιρίαν τῶν ἐπεισαγομένων λόγων διασπῶσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν φιλοτίμως ἐχόντων πρὸς τὴν τῶν πράξεων ἐπίγνωσιν (μεσολαβοῦσι τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν). “One might justly censure those who in their histories insert over-long orations or employ frequent speeches; for not only do they rend asunder the continuity of the narrative by the ill-tempered insertion of speeches, but also they interrupt the interest of those who are eagerly pressing on toward a full knowledge of the events.” Julian, *The Heroic Deeds of Constantius* 59B–C (ed. J. Bidez, vol. 1 [Paris, 1932], 128, 28–31; transl. LCL, vol. 1, 159): Τὰ μὲν δὲ περὶ τὸν μηχανοποιὸν τῆς ὅλης ὑποθέσεως πλείονος ἄξιωθῆναι λόγου, μᾶλλον τῇ πράξει παρελόμενα τὸ ζυνεχὲς τῆς διηγήσεως ἐνταυθα ποῦ πάλιν ἀφεῖναι. “Now though it would be well worth while to devote

quent statement in this regard is perhaps Plutarch's work *On the Malignity of Herodotus*, in which he criticizes the great historian for his inappropriate and ill-intentioned *diegesis*. He begins by listing the characteristics "by which we can determine whether a narrative [*diegesis*] is written with malice or with honesty and good will."<sup>65</sup> Indications of a malicious disposition on the part of the writer are: exaggerated expressions, the introduction of negative details that are irrelevant and distract from the narrative [*diegesin*], or, inversely, the intentional suppression of positive information; further, the preference for the less creditable of two or more alternative versions of a story, the failure to acknowledge the contribution of someone's personal effort to the fortuitous outcome of an event, and the surreptitious insertion of critical comments into a passage intended to bestow praise on someone.<sup>66</sup> As suitable and desirable characteristics for a *diegesis*, by contrast, Plutarch advocates a balanced style, conciseness, completeness, and accuracy. The hagiographers, as has been seen, characterized their *diegeseis* in similar terms by pointing to the absence of rhetorical display and to the implicit truthfulness of their account.

These uses of the word *diegesis* in rhetorical theory and classical literature cannot have entirely passed by the Greek hagiographers of Late Antiquity. By the first century c.e., when Quintilian undertook his synthesis of the earlier rhetorical tradition,<sup>67</sup> the context of the theoretical treatment of *diegesis* had already shifted from judicial oratory to a

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more of my speech to this man who was the author of that whole enterprise, yet it breaks the thread of my narrative, which had reached the thick of the action. So I must leave that subject for the present. . . ."

64. Polybius, *Historiae* 2.40.5 (Buettner-Wobst, vol. 1, 174, 9–12; transl. LCL, vol. 1, 341): he aims to make his narrative easy to follow (εὐπαρακολούθητος). Ibid., 5.31.4 (Buettner-Wobst, vol. 2, 144, 31–145, 1; transl. LCL, vol. 3, 79): he is breaking down the narrative in order to make it easy to follow (εὐπαρακολούθητος) and lucid (σαφής). Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 18.5.1 (ed. Fischer, vol. 4 [Leipzig, 1906], 325, 16–19; transl. LCL, vol. 9, 25): οὕτως γὰρ μάλιστα εὐπαρακολούθητος τοῖς ἀναγινέσκουσιν ≤ διήγησις ἔσται, πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν τεθείσης τῆς ὅλης τοποθεσίας καὶ τῶν διαστημάτων. "For by placing before my readers' eyes the topography in general and the distances I shall best make the narrative easy for them to follow."

65. Plutarch, *De Herodoti malignitate* 855B (ed. G. N. Bernardakis, *Plutarchi Chaeronensis Moralia*, vol. 5 [Leipzig, 1893], 209, 8–10; transl. LCL, vol. 11, 11): ὅσα κοινῇ μὴ καθαρῶς μηδ' εὐμενοῦς ἔστιν ἀλλὰ κακοήθους οἶον ἔχνη καὶ γνωρίσματα διηγῆσεως.

66. Ibid., 855B–856D (Bernardakis, 209, 12–213, 10; transl. LCL, vol. 11, 11–21).

67. Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.2.31–132 (Winterbottom, 206, 20–225, 16; transl. LCL, 67–121).

more general application.<sup>68</sup> The *Progymnasmata* composed in the second century by Hermogenes<sup>69</sup> and in the late fourth–early fifth century by Aphthonios observe the same conventions.<sup>70</sup> These books of school exercises became the foundation of all rhetorical instruction in the Byzantine Empire,<sup>71</sup> and thus the rhetorical concept of *diegesis* continued to be inculcated into generation after generation of students long after the societal transformations of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages had eliminated the need for judicial speeches. It was also very much present in the literature of the Roman Empire, as demonstrated by the examples above. The literary level of the products of the Late Antique hagiographers gives reason to doubt that they underwent any formal rhetorical training, or had extensive exposure to literature produced by non-Christian authors. Nonetheless, in a largely illiterate society, they must have been sufficiently privileged to receive some kind of instruction that enabled them to become authors. It stands to reason that even the most superficial encounter with higher education would have provided them with a certain familiarity, however vague, with the term *diegesis* and its schoolbook definition as a simple and unembellished narrative of events, preferably in chronological sequence, with a claim—whether substantiated or not—to inherent plausibility. The use of *diegesis* in classical literature, both in rhetorical treatises as well as in literary works, provides the foundation of its application in hagiography. But it was the formative experience of desert monasticism, which gave rise to a specific form of “spiritual communication,” that contributed decisively to the development of *diegesis* into an important term in the Greek hagiographical literature of Late Antiquity.

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68. R. Meijering, *Literary and Rhetorical Theories in Greek Scholia* (Groningen, 1987), 73–75.

69. Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* (*Rhetores graeci* 6 [4, 16–19]), distinguishes between four kinds of *diegema*: mythological (μυθικόν), invented (πλασματικόν), historical (ιστορικόν), and political or private (πολιτικόν μὴ ἰδιωτικόν).

70. Aphthonios, *Progymnasmata* (*Rhetores graeci* 10 [2, 14–3, 4]).

71. Cf. Kustas, *Studies*, 5 and 20–23 and P. Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism* (Canberra, 1986; first published as *Le premier humanisme byzantin* [Paris, 1971]), 295.